

ENTERTAINMENT

Moving from the slow waltz to chaos

Master Harold...and the boys
Citadel Theatre
Maclab Stage
Mar. 22-Apr. 17

review by Lisa Trofymow
 "The ballroom is a world in which accidents don't happen."

Athol Fugard

But the St. George's Park Tearoom in Port Elizabeth is not a ballroom, although Willy Malopo — one of master Hally's "boys" — dances between long spells upon his knees while scrubbing the floor. This is South Africa — apartheid, remember? and it's a rainy afternoon in 1950: it's easy to discern time and place thanks to Stencil Campbell's meticulous set for Athol Fugard's *Master Harold...and the boys*. There's a steak 'n' eggs menu chalked on a blackboard, and formica tabletops, real linoleum, and rain falling past the tearoom window. But the deserted place becomes warm and alive with Willy's first awkward steps. He — with his pantlegs rolled to his knees like a child's — is practicing for the big ballroom dancing contest. Meanwhile, friend Sam Semela — appearing more dignified in his vest and long trousers — reads some of Master Harold's old comic books (he reads all Harold reads, from Shakespeare to Plato).

Then Hally, "Master Harold", as only Willy calls him, bursts into the tearoom with his teenaged vigour — and so begins the relentless increase of the play's tempo from slow waltz to chaos. At first the three friends "dance" through cherished memories — one of which is of Sam and little Hally flying kites. However, the characters describe rather than enact this memory, which challenges the actors to gain the audience's attention and sympathy through words rather than action. Not to fear: the kite scene is at once poetic and emotive.

And as the play's tempo increases, accidents must and do occur. Hally learns, much



Master Harold... and the boys (from left to right: Errol Slue, Mark Saunders, George Seremba): Their waltz ends in pain, shame and destruction.

to his dismay and anger, that his drunken, crippled father (for whom Sam has substituted himself as Hally's mentor) is returning home. Somehow Hally throws his wrath on Sam, who gentles the youth and reveals his own romantic metaphor of life: the beauty of ballroom dancing.

But St. George's Park Tearoom is not a place for dancing — especially for Hally, who views dancing "anthropologically". Thus he cannot help but ruin the dance between the three characters. Their waltz ends in pain and shame and destruction. "Is bad. Is all bad

in here," moans Willy after Sam and Hally have a 'bad bump'. South African politics ruin their dance of friendship, perhaps forever.

Errol Slue's (Sam) performance seems as relaxed and effortless as his dancing. He's there onstage — his presence is at once commanding and intriguing. Mark Saunders' Hally (an autobiographical persona of Athol Fugard) is a confused, destructive youth yet is also naive and fresh. We understand why Sam loves him. Sam and Hally are perfect character foils. Where Hally is intellect, Sam is heart.

Willy, (George Seremba) then, might be the hands which may serve — as seems his obligation as a black South African. Seremba and Slue give particularly passionate yet articulate performances unique to the familiar symbolized acting of many players in the Citadel's company.

Do see this play. It's co-produced by the Centaur Theatre Company of Montreal and runs till April 7th in the Citadel's Maclab Theatre.

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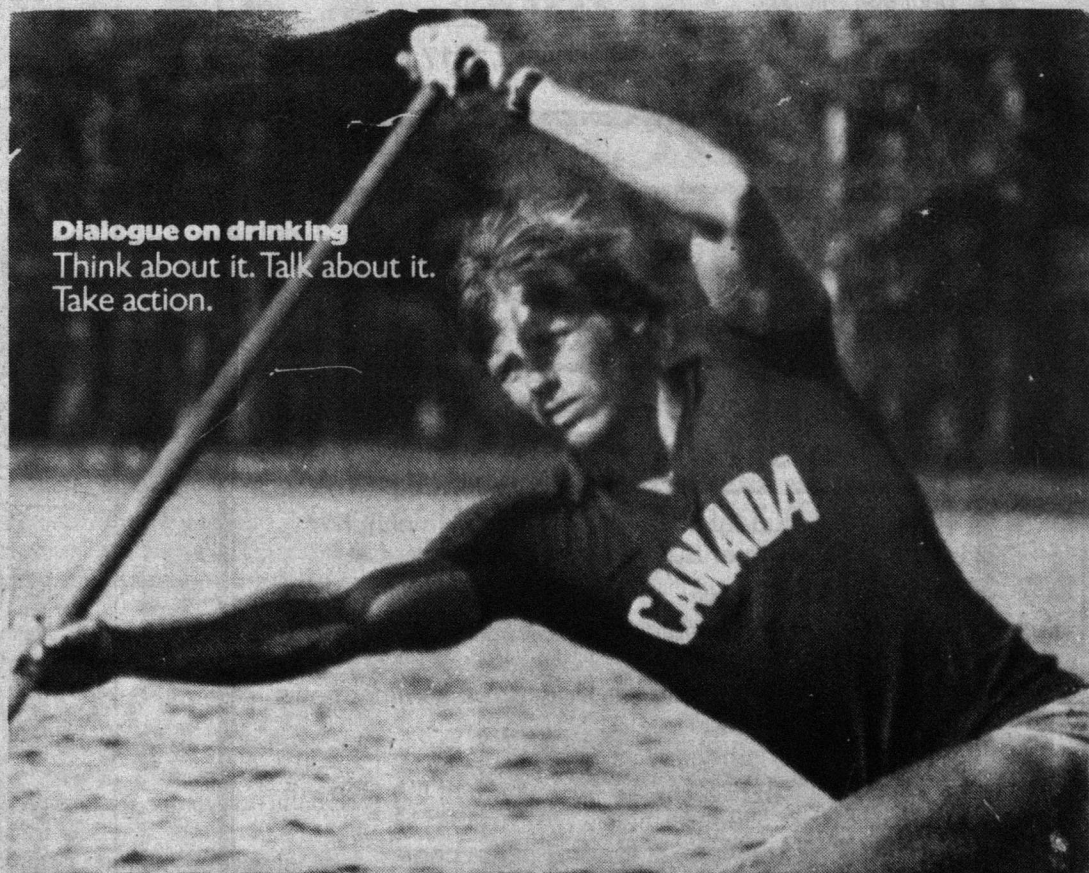
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